

War Between The Machines

The Ultra Secret
by F. W. Winterbotham

Harper & Row; \$8.95)

I never thought a book would make me sympathize with Hitler. *The Ultra Secret*, which tells how the Allies were able to read Hitler's most secure messages often before they reached his own generals in the field, is just such an anomaly. Recounting the story of how the British broke the top secret code of the German armed forces and used the intelligence to outwit Hitler throughout World War II, F. W. Winterbotham, covertly a Wing Commander in the RAF, covertly an agent of the British Secret Service, shows that many of Hitler's military decisions, far from being ingenious, were remarkably ingenious: time after time the Nazi tyrant came within a lance of defeating the Allies, and perhaps of conquering the world—had it not been for Ultra which betrayed his every move. In Germany the book could revive the mythus of an infallible Hitler, a genius cheated of his rightful victories by perfidious Albion who underhandedly managed to spy on him and frustrate his best laid plans. The true perfidy, of course, was the British policy of closing an eye to German rearmament in the 1930s, hoping that the Nazis might be used as a bulwark against the peril of communism.

How well the British were informed of the buildup of the Nazi war machine is made pellucid by Winterbotham himself. As an agent of British Intelligence in the years before the war, he was shown the most secret power of the German armed forces thanks to his personal contacts with Hitler and his top cronies such as Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolf Hess and Erich Koch. From Hitler's favorite general, Walther von Reichenau, Winterbotham learned the plans for the German blitzkrieg against Russia; from General Albert Kesselring he learned the composition of the illegal German air fleets and their techniques for dive bombing.

The story put out by Winterbotham, that British Intelligence at the outbreak of World War II managed with the help of a Polish defector to obtain a precise copy of the highly complex German

THE NEW REPUBLIC

coding machine known as Enigma, has the earmarks of a cover story, but the results it produced were the real thing. In this very readable book put together in some haste when the "Top Secret" lid was taken off the story, Winterbotham describes how after months of intensive effort a team of top British mathematicians and cryptanalysts were able to duplicate the Nazi coding machine. With the help of another highly sophisticated machine they intercepted and deciphered German signals to and from Hitler and his generals, often within minutes. The special intelligence obtained from this source was code-named Ultra; its high-priority use explains why Eisenhower became a Charlie McCarthy to Churchill's Edgar Bergen. It also explains why the war kept degenerating into a private joust between Hitler and Churchill in which the commanding generals on both sides, jealous of their stolen prerogatives, tended to avoid implementing the orders of their supreme commanders, with the result that both war machines often failed to fulfill their inherent potential.

For anyone who survived the Second World War, Winterbotham's book will be heady reading. It is full of facts and figures that cast new light on the main events of the war, which will now require some drastic revision by military historians. It is a pity that Winterbotham, who served as security officer and chief disseminator of the Ultra information throughout the war—when any error would be deadly—should have been slipshod enough in his book to twice mislabel the Fourteenth German Army on a single page and on the same page mistake May thirteenth for May thirtieth.

Ironically, the very high standard of intelligence provided by Ultra was sometimes so surprising that it risked not being believed by Eisenhower and his subordinates. However, when acted upon, it permitted the Allies a whole series of narrow escapes. Thanks to Ultra, the British expeditionary force in France and Belgium was able to extricate itself at Dunkirk and live to fight another day. During the Battle of Britain, Ultra's precise information about the strength and targets of the Luftwaffe, enabled British fighter pilots to whittle down the German bomber squadrons and avoid a mass confrontation which Goering counted on to destroy the RAF and pave the way for Hitler's "Sealion" invasion of Britain.

In the Western Desert, Ultra enabled Montgomery to outfox Rommel at the

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very gates of Cairo, then turn the tide at Alamein. Thereafter it was shooting ducks in Mare Nostrum for the Navy which had the exact course and sailing date of every convoy destined to replenish Rommel. On the other hand, the massive Allied convoys bearing troops for the Northwest African landings were able to sail unmolested past a pack of forty German submarines carefully spotted by Ultra.

Even in the West the great battles hung on Ultra. In France after D-day General Omar Bradley was able to dig in and withstand a massive counterattack conceived and personally directed by Hitler, which could have routed the Allies and driven them back to the sea. Thanks to Ultra the attack was stemmed, with massive carnage, and was turned into the decisive defeat of the Germans in the West. Had Allied commanders not been bickering, thirty thousand Germans might not have slipped away in the fog.

But just as *The Ultra Secret* validates Hitler's wartime flair, it constitutes a granite epitaph to the delinquencies and incompetencies of generals on the Allied side. In Italy, had Allied commanders taken full and proper advantage of the Ultra information at their disposal they could have destroyed Kesselring's Tenth and Fourteenth Armies. Instead, they repeatedly failed.

When General Mark W. Clark, who was to form and command the US Fifth Army, was first briefed on Ultra he apparently did not grasp the importance of what he was being told and left the briefing saying he had other things to attend to. Patton replied to Winterbotham: "You know, young man, I think you had better tell all this to my Intelligence staff. I don't go much on this sort of thing myself. You see, I just like fighting."

As D-day for Salerno approached, the Allies had the benefit of Hitler's messages to and from his commander in the Italian theater, General Albert Kesselring. Why General Maxwell Taylor was allowed to call off the landing of the 82nd Airborne division around Rome when Eisenhower was reading Hitler's signals to Kesselring to retire, is one of the great coverup mysteries of the war.

And at Anzio when General Lucas' amphibious corps landed successfully with complete strategic surprise, he could easily have fulfilled Churchill's

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